



Testimony of

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**  
By

Richard F. Weidman,  
Executive Director for Policy and Government Affairs

Before the

**Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity**  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
United States House of Representatives

Concerning

Accelerated Education Benefits for Veterans

May 3, 2007

Chairwoman Sandlin, Ranking Member Boozman, and members of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) thanks you for the opportunity to testify here today. And on behalf of our officers, our Board of Directors, our members and their families, we thank you, too, for the important work you are doing, and the initiatives you are taking, on behalf of our nation's veterans. Not everyone will need medical care or other services, but everyone (including disabled veterans) will need a job and/or assistance and training that will help lead to gainful employment, and their fullest possible reintegration into the life of our country.

We would like to focus our comments this morning on just a narrow issue of non credit training, particularly entrepreneurial training for those who wish to go into small business or self employment. It has been said so often that by now it is almost a truism to say that self employment is many times not only the best avenue for disabled veterans (particularly profoundly disabled veterans) to secure gainful employment worthy of their talents where they live, but it may be the only way. That may be particularly true in rural areas like most of South Dakota and northwest Arkansas, and many other parts of the country. It is worth bearing in mind that apparently more than half of those deployed overseas come from towns of 25,000 or less, where job opportunities are much more truncated than is the case in more highly urbanized areas of the United States. This makes the work of this Subcommittee all the more important.

VVA strongly favored the extension of the Montgomery GI Bill Benefits to pay for special vocational programs in the past few years, including the initiative for non-credit courses for those who need additional training in order to succeed at the business they are already working, or to be prepared to more successfully launch a business on which they are embarking.

It has become clear that the rules for approving some of these courses are so stringent as to discourage many of the Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) from even trying to have their courses approved. It is a matter of striking a reasonable balance between quality and accessibility, between the hours spent in the classroom and the way adults actually do most learning today in this digital day of almost universal access to the Internet and computers. VVA would suggest that this is particularly for those who are in

business or about to launch their own business. Their time for studying and processing the material is often whenever they can fit it in, which is often an hour here and an hour there during the work day (which is often 12 or more hours), and that often will not conform to the needs of a more traditional classroom model.

I must caution that VVA has always, and continues to have the highest respect for the way in which most of the State Approving Agency people do their job of protecting veterans from unscrupulous operators of “fly-by-night” businesses that masquerade as legitimate training academies of one sort or another.

However, the Nation’s system of more than one thousand Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) are NOT unscrupulous operators, but well respected and sought after resources, that are often the genesis of as well as one of the engines of prosperity for economic development within an area. As you know, there is at least one SBDC in each of the 435 Congressional Districts in the country, because everybody wanted one!

Most of their offerings are paid for straight out of the pocket of the entrepreneurs and would be entrepreneurs and small business owners. They pay for these courses and training regimen because they believe that this knowledge and training will help them have a better chance of succeeding at their small business. Overall experience in the small business community indicates that they are correct that their chances of success are greatly enhanced by purchasing such training.

It is clear that the SAA continue to uphold what they see as the clear legal standards set in law and regulation for traditional training, and do a fine job of it. The problem is that many of the veterans who are in small business want and need training that is not offered in these traditional formats from the SBDC. Congress enacted changes in the GI Bill in order to help these veteran business owners and entrepreneurs to be able to receive assistance to pay for these courses. However, nothing was done to change the format of the standards and bench marks that the SAA must adhere to in upholding quality standards to reflect that these are often not traditional classroom training. It is clear that the Congress must now work with the Association of Small Business Development Centers and others to develop language in the

law that both protects the veteran and yet makes it possible for approval of the many fine offerings of the SBDC needed by veteran owned businesses. Given that the very nature of the delivery system for adult learning in America continues to evolve, it is hardly likely that this problem is limited to just the entrepreneurial courses offered by the SBDC. Therefore an initiative that offers a new legal paradigm is needed in Title 38 to accommodate this vital vocational training.

Further, VVA supports an initiative which would extend and improve certain authorities of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs related to providing State Approving Agencies (SAAs) with funding necessary to fulfill their statutory responsibilities and more importantly, provide veterans with services that are vital to the success of the various educational assistance programs. Simply said – State Approving Agencies are the face of the GI Bill at the state level, and need more funds to properly do their job.

In this same vein, VVA supports extending the current rates of payment for veterans who are enrolled in an apprenticeship or other on-the-job training program. We believe that this provision will allow more veterans who cannot or choose not to enroll in an institutional program to pursue training for an occupation or profession leading more directly to gainful employment, which not only helps retuning veterans and demobilized National Guard and Reserve members to better readjust to civilian life, but it also helps them to help America be more competitive in the world economy.

This concludes our testimony. Again, VVA is appreciative of having been afforded the opportunity to testify and offer our views here today. I would be pleased to respond to any of your questions.

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA  
Funding Statement  
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The national organization Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is a non-profit veterans' membership organization registered as a 501(c)(19) with the Internal Revenue Service. VVA is also appropriately registered with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

VVA is not currently in receipt of any federal grant or contract, other than the routine allocation of office space and associated resources in VA Regional Offices for outreach and direct services through its Veterans Benefits Program (Service Representatives). This is also true of the previous two fiscal years.

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Richard F. “Rick” Weidman is Executive Director for Policy and Government Affairs on the National Staff of Vietnam Veterans of America. As such, he is the primary spokesperson for VVA in Washington. He served as a 1-A-O Army Medical Corpsman during the Vietnam War, including service with Company C, 23<sup>rd</sup> Med, AMERICAL Division, located in I Corps of Vietnam in 1969.

Mr. Weidman was part of the staff of VVA from 1979 to 1987, serving variously as Membership Service Director, Agency Liaison, and Director of Government Relations. He left VVA to serve in the Administration of Governor Mario M. Cuomo as statewide director of veterans’ employment & training (State Veterans Programs Administrator) for the New York State Department of Labor.

He has served as Consultant on Legislative Affairs to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV), and served at various times on the VA Readjustment Advisory Committee, the Secretary of Labor’s Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment & Training, the President’s Committee on Employment of Persons with Disabilities - Subcommittee on Disabled Veterans, Advisory Committee on Veterans’ Entrepreneurship at the Small Business Administration, and numerous other advocacy posts. He currently serves as Chairman of the Task Force for Veterans’ Entrepreneurship, which has become the principal collective voice for veteran and disabled veteran small-business owners.

Mr. Weidman was an instructor and administrator at Johnson State College (Vermont) in the 1970s, where he was also active in community and veterans affairs. He attended Colgate University (B.A., 1967), and did graduate study at the University of Vermont.

He is married and has four children.